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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 CHIANG MAI 000178

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TH](#)
SUBJECT: PRO AND ANTI-THAKSIN GROUPS IN CHIANG MAI: A PROFILE

REF: A. BANGKOK 3454 (ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS)
[1](#)B. BANGKOK 3280 (THAKSIN ADDRESSES RALLY)
[1](#)C. CHIANG MAI 168 (POLITICAL TEMPERATURE)
[1](#)D. CHIANG MAI 147 (PM'S VISIT)
[1](#)E. CHIANG MAI 145 (VIOLENT CLASH)

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CLASSIFIED BY: Alex Barrasso, Chief, Pol/Econ, CG Chiang Mai.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

Summary and Comment

[1](#)1. (C) There are two anti-Thaksin groups, but only one main pro-Thaksin group based in Chiang Mai, according to journalists and members of the three groups. The pro-Thaksin group is financed by Thaksin himself, while the two People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD)-sympathetic groups are self-funded and supported by donations from the public. Both use community radio stations to convey their message, though the pro-Thaksin group appears better organized. Despite denials by its leaders, the pro-Thaksin United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) group has engaged in violence, and appears to be prepared to continue to do so if necessary. The pro-PAD groups on the other hand appear not to be, though one of them is closely linked with a core PAD leader in Bangkok. In a disturbing trend, feuds between the groups have become personal, as exemplified by three recent incidents. Though several thousand PAD supporters from northern Thailand traveled to Bangkok to join PAD's November 24 rally (Ref A), the UDD group has not made plans to follow suit, and only a couple of hundred supporters attended the UDD's Nov. 24 rally in Chiang Mai.

[1](#)2. (C) Comment: Chiang Mai is a regional political heavyweight; it elects 11 MPs to the lower house, more than any other northern Thai province, most of which have five or less. Moreover, Chiang Mai has been a stronghold of Thaksin, the governing coalition parties, and Thaksin's now-defunct Thai Rak Thai party since 2001, with Thai Rak Thai winning all but one MP seat that year, taking all the seats in the 2005 election, and the governing People's Power Party (PPP) taking all but two seats in the 2007 election, with those it did not win going to coalition partners.

[1](#)3. (C) Comment Continued: The fact that only 200 supporters attended the UDD's Nov. 24 Chiang Mai rally while several thousand PAD supporters took to the streets of Bangkok may not be significant. In Chiang Mai, PAD appears to be a vocal minority, likely composed mainly of academics and city dwellers such as civil servants. This would explain why the Democrat Party received a significantly higher proportion of votes in Chiang Mai City District than in outer-lying districts. Regardless of who their supporters are, the tendency of both groups to personalize their political differences is disturbing,

and may portend more violence between them as the crisis deepens. End Summary and Comment.

The Pro-Thaksin Love Chiang Mai 51

14. (C) Rak Chiang Mai 51, or Love Chiang Mai 51, the main pro-Thaksin group in Chiang Mai, which is affiliated with the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD), boasts about 20,000 members, according to Phetcharawat Wattanapongsirikul, who serves as an advisor to the group and was the main interlocutor at our meeting with him and the group's President, Narisuan Thongyaem. Right across from the Grand Warorot Hotel in the old city center, which Phetcharawat owns and which serves as the group's main headquarters, a tent for holding rallies still stands. Phetcharawat told us that during the week, several hundred members attend the daily evening rallies, and that on weekends, the number of attendees is closer to 2,000. At the group's rally on Monday Nov. 24 attended by Consulate staff, the number of attendees did not exceed 200.

15. (C) Phetcharawat told us the group is funded by donations from the public, though there are credible reports that the group receives funding from politicians. Amnat Jongyotying, a journalist with the Daily Phaknua (Northern Region) paper, told us that the group receives money from a former Chiang Mai MP, a statement corroborated by Thoedsak Jimkitwattana, who runs the pro-PAD (Peoples' Alliance for Democracy) community radio station. Thoedsak also told us the Rak Chiang Mai group received approximately 430,000 dollars from Thaksin himself, channeled through the same former Chiang Mai MP fingered by Amnat, and some from close Thaksin ally and former House Speaker Yongyuth Tiyapairat. According to Phetcharawat, the radio station operates with funds received from corporate sponsors, which amount to just over \$1,420 a month.

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16. (C) According to Phetcharawat, Love Chiang Mai 51 boasts about 30,000 card-carrying members. He asserted that all subscribe to an SMS service the group runs via which it communicates information about rallies and other events. The service costs subscribers just under a dollar a month, with all the revenue going to the phone company that provides the service. The other main means of communication for the group is the pro-Thaksin community radio station owned by Phetcharawat, and operated out of the Grand Warorot Hotel. Between the community radio station and the SMS network, the group can mobilize around 500 supporters within a half hour, according to Phetcharawat.

What About the PAD?

17. (C) Thoedsak, who owns and operates the local pro-PAD community radio station, separately founded a group called "Soldiers of the King and Queen," which, although sympathetic to the PAD, has as its main aim the defense of the Monarchy, and according to him has about 4,000 members. Though Thoedsak says his group shares PAD's views about the political situation, he emphasized that there are no formal links between his group and the local PAD affiliate described in para 8 below. Nonetheless, Thoedsak plays an important role according to Amnat as the owner of the radio station, which constantly broadcasts from the PAD stage at Government House in Bangkok. The station was in fact broadcasting from Government House on the day we visited. According to Thoedsak, about 500,000 loyal listeners tune in to the station daily, a number which Amnat sees as inflated given that it can only be heard within a 15 kilometer radius of the broadcast studio. As for meeting the operating costs of his station and running his PAD-sympathetic group, Thoedsak told us he relies on donations from the public, which range from just under \$50 to as much as \$850 a day.

18. (C) Separate from Thoedsak's group is the local PAD affiliate, led by Bunnaroth Buaklee of the daily newspaper "Manager," which reports on political and business news, and Suriyan Tongnueid, a former student leader and key NGO organizer for farmers' rights and those of ethnic minorities. They told us that the local PAD group has about 3,000 members in Chiang Mai, some of whom are also members of Thoedsak's group. Suriyan, who works closely with Phiphop Thongchai, one of the PAD's core leaders in Bangkok, told us that his group exchanges information with Thoedsak's group and generally agrees with its views, though they do not cooperate with each other. Bunnaroth said Thoedsak sees himself as the PAD's next top leader in Chiang Mai, but that he has a reputation for being corrupt and lacking transparency. Suriyan added that Thoedsak does not speak for PAD as he claims, but that as long as he doesn't do or say anything that harms PAD, Thoedsak is not a hindrance.

19. (C) Bunnaroth and Suriyan said that about 50-60 PAD supporters are traveling to and returning from Bangkok on a daily basis. Information we received from labor union contacts on Nov. 24 indicates that this number is currently on the rise, with some 8,000 PAD supporters reportedly traveling from Chiang Mai to Bangkok to join the PAD's Nov. 24 rallies there. (Note: Although tens of thousands of people rallied with PAD in Bangkok early on November 24, total demonstration size has shrunk to under 10,000. End Note.)

110. (C) Suriyan told us the local PAD movement receives donations from the public, and donates any excess to the PAD in Bangkok. Phaknua journalist Amnat pointed out, however, that the PAD in general is self-financed, speculating that the Chiang Mai branch is no different. Suriyan admitted that aside from organizing supporters to go to Bangkok, the PAD's activities in Chiang Mai are limited to organizing seminars (of which by our count there have only been two since July), and to distributing DVDs and literature.

More Violence not out of the Question

111. (C) Some violent clashes between the Chiang Mai PAD and UDD groups have already occurred, as detailed in Refs C and E, and the potential for more exists. Though he denied any use of violence by his group in the past, Rak Chiang Mai 51's Phetcharawat told us that if Thaksin returns to Thailand and is arrested, "more than one million red-shirts will be out on the streets." (Red is the color adopted by Thaksin supporters.) For his part, PAD's Suriyan said that violence might be unavoidable because Thaksin continues to "attack" the country and the Monarchy from the outside and the military has not acted. He predicted an eventual clash between Thaksin

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supporters and defenders of the Monarchy.

112. (C) Suriyan, Bunnaroth and the journalist Amnat all related instances in which they were threatened. In Bunnaroth's case, he said phone callers recited his children's names and the schools at which they studied in a threatening tone. For his part, Suriyan said he received a death threat by mail. Amnat told us that on three occasions, he was harassed by red-shirted men while reporting on Democrat Party activities in Chiang Mai. All claimed they filed police reports but that their cases had not been followed up on.

113. (C) The differences in political views between these groups has also gotten personal. Phetcharawat told us Thoedsak said on air once that he (Phetcharawat) had gone blind due to some unspecified bad deeds. (Note: Phetcharawat did not appear to have any trouble seeing when we met him.) For its part, the Love Chiang Mai 51 group undertook on the weekend of Nov. 22-23 to interrupt a wedding party attended by a Democrat Party official from Bangkok by blocking the road until he agreed not to attend and to instead return to Bangkok. The group also sent

100 supporters to a concert at which a prominent singer sympathetic to the PAD was due to perform. Upon discovering that she was not present, the group disbanded.

14. (U) This cable was coordinated with Embassy Bangkok.
ANDERSON